



**Association of Bay Area Governments
Bay Area Air Quality Management District
Metropolitan Transportation Commission**

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Joint Policy Committee / Regional Planning Program

Date: September 14, 2006
To: Joint Policy Committee
From: Regional Planning Program Director
Subject: Bay Area Regional Position on Planning and CEQA

At its meeting of July 21, 2006, in response to a request from State Senator Tom Torlakson, the JPC discussed a regional position on CEQA reform related to the facilitation of infill development. The JPC directed the Regional Planning Program Director to draft a letter reflecting is discussion for consideration at the Committee's September meeting. A draft letter is attached.

I RECOMMEND:

THAT the Joint Policy Committee authorize the Committee Chair to sign the attached letter and forward it to Senator Torlakson on the Committee's behalf.



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Joint Policy Committee

Senator Tom Torlakson
State Capital
Room 4032
Sacramento, California 95014

Dear Senator Torlakson:

Infill Housing, CEQA Reform and Community Planning

At a hearing of the Senate Select Committee on California Infrastructure, you asked whether the Bay Area's regional agencies had a position on CEQA reform as it relates to the facilitation of infill housing development.

As you know, the Bay Area's Joint Policy Committee (JPC) coordinates the regional planning activities of the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG), the Bay Area Air Quality Management District (BAAQMD), and the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC). The JPC is composed of local-government appointees, mostly elected officials, who serve on the governing bodies of each of the member agencies.

Among the JPC's responsibilities are implementation and refinement of the Bay Area's *Network of Neighborhoods Vision*, the first smart-growth strategy for a California metropolitan area. Our regional Vision supports and encourages infill housing development. Infill uses existing infrastructure, is more likely to be efficiently served by transit, contributes to jobs/housing balance, helps revitalize existing communities, and does not consume sensitive or productive land resources.

The JPC discussed your question at its July and September meetings. We observed that affected neighborhoods often use project-specific CEQA as a forum for their concerns about infill projects. Sometimes this results in an unintended negative consequence for the regional environment. For instance, there is a tendency to mitigate local environmental impacts by reducing project densities. In a context of continuing growth, housing not accommodated within existing communities at moderately higher densities will be built on far-flung greenfields, usually at lower densities. This may consume more environmentally sensitive or agriculturally valuable land and put more cars on the road for longer distances.

Communities frequently turn to project-specific CEQA because they lack more positive instruments to direct and manage change. The reactive CEQA process has become a substitute for a more proactive planning process. This leads us to our principle conclusion: we may need to reform CEQA, but we need first to restore high-quality, participative planning to our regions, cities, and local communities.

Over the next couple of decades, the population of California is projected to increase by another third. Present Californians clearly want to participate in shaping where this growth goes and

how it is accommodated with new public and private investment. It is not sufficient to involve them on a project-by-project basis. Preparing for California's growth requires an integrated system of regional, general, and neighborhood planning. And this system needs to encourage meaningful public involvement at all levels. Implemented in a serious and properly resourced way, this would help change the question from "What don't we like about this project?" to "What kind of place do we want to become?"

Proposition 1C on the November ballot includes \$850 million for a Regional Planning and Infill Incentive Account. Should the voters approve this bond, we urge you to consider directing a sizable amount of the funding toward public-responsive planning. We believe that this is required in addition to the planning money which may be approved as part of Proposition 84. Restoring meaningful, participative planning to California will help restore confidence in the future for our existing communities while also providing greater certainty for the housing development industry.

We would welcome the opportunity to work with you and your colleagues on ways in which the state could encourage, and ensure continuing funding, to planning suitable to the growth challenges facing California and its regions.

Sincerely,

Jon Rubin
Chair
Joint Policy Committee